

Why Be Concerned About Teen Drinking?

New Research Shows Alcohol Harms a Teen's Developing Brain

"The brain goes through dynamic change during adolescence [ages 12-21] and alcohol can seriously damage long- and short-term growth processes."

(American Medical Association Fact Sheet, 2003)

Alcohol affects a teen brain differently from an adult brain and can harm brain development. It may impair memory and learning, decision-making, and impulse control. It greatly increases the risk of addiction.

These SPECT images show functional activity levels in the brain of a healthy non-drinker (left), and that of a sober 21-year old with a four-year history of heavy alcohol use (right). The "holes" indicate areas of reduced brain activity.



Scans by Dr. Daniel Amen - www.amenclinic.com ©2004 All rights reserved.

The brain areas that encourage impulsivity and risk-taking develop early in a teen, while areas that improve self-control and inhibit impulsive behavior don't develop until the very late teens or early 20s. Parents underestimate the extent of teen drinking. 31% of youth who said they had been drunk in the past year were said by their parents to be nondrinkers. To be alcohol-free, your child needs your awareness and help.

You Are the Most Powerful Influence on Your Child's Behavior

Education alone is not enough to deter teens from drinking as they enter the difficult social transitions to adulthood, because there are many pressures and opportunities to drink. Parents who are actively involved can have a powerful influence on their child's decision to remain alcohol-free. Teen perceptions of parental disapproval are great deterrents:

"What parents may not realize is that children say parental disapproval of underage drinking is the key reason they have chosen not to drink."

*(Charles Curie, SAMHSA Administrator,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.)*

Research indicates that children are less likely to drink when their parents are involved in their lives and when they and their parents report feeling close to each other. Family conflict and lack of bonding are associated with increased risk of drinking. Mixed messages and unclear rules and expectations also leave kids more vulnerable to underage drinking.

In addition to being close to children and involved in their lives, research shows that parents can influence their children by doing the following:

1. Learn and explain the risks of underage drinking. Emphasize that drinking alcohol is not a "rite of passage" but a dangerous drug for a teen brain.
2. Have daily, positive communication.
3. Set clear rules and expectations about no alcohol.
4. Consistently enforce rules, giving consequences.
5. Monitor children's activities and stress levels.
6. Help them choose friends who support your rules.
7. Ensure that alcohol is not available to your child at home or from friends when your child is away.

**See stopalcoholabuse.gov
for more great parenting tips**
(click "Start Talking Before They Start Drinking" logo)

TIPS TO "START TALKING"

PLAY REPORTER

Use the questions below to "interview" your child, and then let your child interview you. Allow these to lead you into a longer conversation. Remember to make the questions appropriate to your child's age. For example, you might ask a teenager about his or her future goals, but you might ask a younger child, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

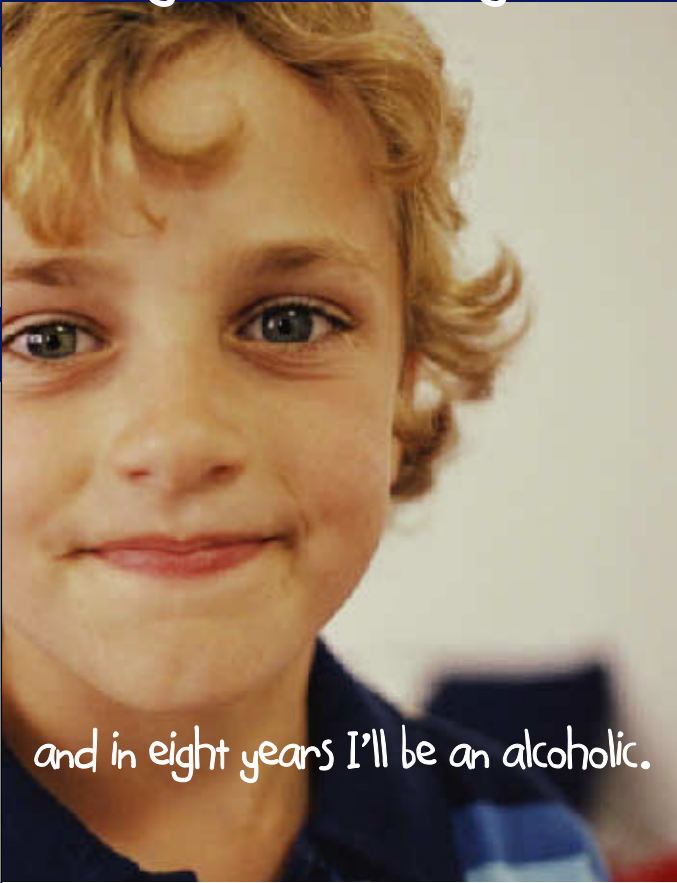
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What three words would you use to describe yourself? To describe me?
2. Who are some of your role models? What do you admire about these people?
3. What scares or concerns you? What makes you happy?
4. What are your future goals?
5. How would drinking alcohol before your brain is fully developed get in the way of your goals?
6. What would you do if you were offered alcohol at a party?
7. What would you do if the person responsible for driving you has been drinking alcohol?
8. What would you really like to ask me but are too afraid to talk about?

Be sure to practice "active listening" (repeating back in your own words what you thought your child said). Showing this interest validates your child's feelings and makes him or her feel worthwhile. If your child says things you don't agree with, seek to understand his or her point of view, but make sure your child knows your beliefs. As children grow up, they may seem to no longer listen... but they are. KEEP TALKING!

Sponsored by: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Utah Div. of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, CCJJ/USAAV, Utah State Office of Education; Safe and Drug-Free Schools; MADD; Utah Dept. of Public Safety; Utah Dept. of Alcoholic Beverage Control; LDS Hospital, and the Ad Council. References: go to www.utahprevention.org

my name is Tyler



and in eight years I'll be an alcoholic.

I'll start drinking in middle school, just at parties. But my parents won't start talking to me about it until high school. And by then, I will already be in some trouble. The thing is, my parents won't even see it coming.

**START TALKING
BEFORE THEY START
DRINKING!**



HOW ALCOHOL HARMS A TEEN BRAIN

During the teen years, two areas of the brain undergo rapid development or “wiring.”



“The prefrontal area [responsible for good judgment, planning, decision-making, and impulse control] undergoes the most change during adolescence. Researchers found that adolescent drinking could cause severe changes in this area... which plays an important role in forming adult personality and behavior... Damage from alcohol at this time can be long-term and irreversible.” (American Medical Association Fact Sheet, 2003)



“The hippocampus [involved in learning and memory] ...suffers from the worst alcohol-related brain damage in teens... Those who had been drinking more and for longer had significantly smaller hippocampi (10%)... In addition, short term or moderate drinking impairs learning and memory far more in youth than adults... Frequent drinkers may never be able to catch up in adulthood, since alcohol inhibits systems crucial for storing new information.” (AMA Fact Sheet, 2003)

Alcohol damage can cause young people to:

- Develop social problems.
- Have poor judgment.
- Get into trouble.
- Do poorly in school.
- Experience failure in achieving lifelong goals.

DRINKING MAY PROGRAM A BRAIN FOR ALCOHOLISM

The brain rewards positive actions with feelings of pleasure, so we want to repeat them.

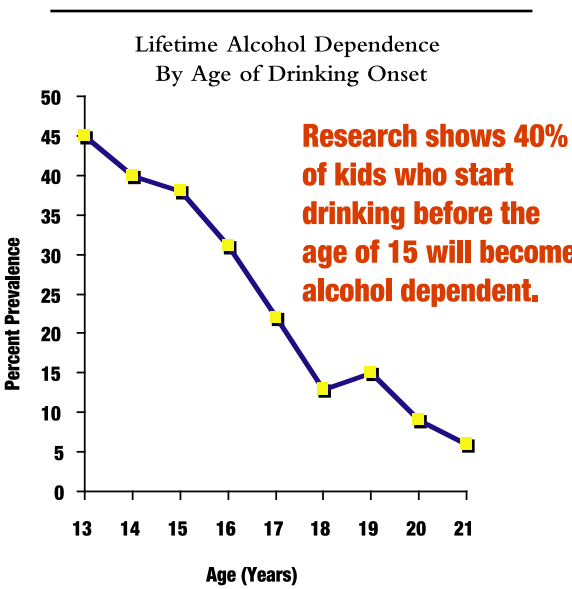
We remember pleasure from dopamine, a “feel-good” brain chemical, or neurotransmitter, which connects the pleasure to the thing we enjoyed.

Alcohol affects our brain’s pleasure-reward system by pretending to be a neurotransmitter. It tricks the brain into generating pleasure-reward feelings from a harmful chemical instead of a real experience.

But alcohol can also damage the brain’s ability to sense pleasure from normal, healthy things and experiences – leaving a young person feeling “flat” about things he/she previously enjoyed.



Because the teen brain produces an abundance of dopamine, it can go rapidly from liking, to wanting, to needing alcohol, programming it for alcoholism.



Grant, BF and Dawson, DA. *Journal of Substance Abuse* 9:103-110. 1997

WHAT PARENTS NEED TO DO

1. CREATE A POSITIVE, LOVING HOME ENVIRONMENT

- Be kind and respectful to each other.
- Eat dinner together; have pleasant conversation.
- Do fun activities to promote family bonding.
- Notice and compliment the good in your child.
- In correcting your child, have at least a 4-to-1 ratio of positive comments to negative ones.

2. TALK EARLY AND OFTEN WITH YOUR CHILD

- Be friendly and interested. Talk with your child daily about his/her interests. Listen to concerns.
- Discuss your family values and boundaries (i.e., no alcohol, tobacco, inhalants, or other drugs).
- Teach your children to protect their brain; it makes them who they are.

3. HELP THEM BECOME COMPETENT AND INVOLVED

- Young people are much less likely to drink if they have a talent and positive activities to do.

4. TEACH CHILDREN TO CHOOSE FRIENDS WISELY

- Teach qualities to look for in a friend, especially one who supports your values and your rules against drinking.

5. MONITOR YOUR CHILD’S ACTIVITIES

- Always know where your children are, who they are with, and what they are doing. Get to know your children's friends and their parents. Ensure that your children have adult supervision and an alcohol-free environment. Help provide safe, “no-alcohol” fun.

6. HELP CHILDREN DEAL WITH STRESS OR DEPRESSION

- Stress or depression can lead to drinking. Help them cope in healthy ways: music, exercise, talking with a counselor or doctor, etc.

7. IF YOU, AS AN ADULT, CHOOSE TO DRINK ALCOHOL:

- Always drink alcohol in moderation (1 drink a day for females, or 2 drinks a day for males).
- Don't use alcohol as an escape from problems.
- Don't portray alcohol use as fun or glamorous.
- Keep alcohol locked up and away from kids.

TIPS ON SETTING NO-ALCOHOL RULES

1. SET CLEAR RULES AND CONSEQUENCES

Make clear, sensible rules for your children, and consequences for breaking them, with regard to alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, curfew, etc. Enforce the rules with consistent and appropriate consequences every time. Let children know that following these rules can help protect their physical safety and mental well-being, which can lower their risk for substance abuse problems.

2. BE SPECIFIC

Explain family rules and the behavior you expect. For example, “Underage drinking can damage your brain and cause early addiction. It's also against the law. Do not drink any alcohol before age 21. If alcohol is at a party, call me, and I'll come get you.”

3. POST AND REVIEW RULES

Write out your most important family rules and post them clearly where they are seen often by everyone in the family. Review rules regularly.

4. BE CONSISTENT

Be sure your child understands that the rules apply at all times, even at other people’s houses. Calmly, fairly, and consistently apply the stated consequences for breaking rules every time. Follow your own rules.

5. BE REASONABLE

Don’t change the rules mid-stream or add new consequences without talking to your children beforehand. Avoid unrealistic threats.

6. RECOGNIZE AND REWARD GOOD BEHAVIOR

Always let your children know how pleased you are when they respect the rules of the home. Be specific as you praise, and include how keeping the rules actually benefits THEM.